



The southern leopard frog, once common here but there's been no sign of it for some years. *Chris Camacho photo*

## Researcher visits Island in search of missing frog

The southern leopard frog (*Rana sphenoccephala*) used to be ubiquitous, with its loud chorusing from freshwater ponds nearly deafening, even as late as the 1980s. But now it's beginning to look — and sound — as if the leopard frog is a thing of the past in this region.

Jeremy Feinberg, a Ph.D. student at Rutgers University, is studying the decline and possible extinction of the southern leopard frog from Long Island.

He has worked for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service at the Brookhaven National Lab and conducted his master's research on turtles at the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge. In May, he visited Shelter Island, a historic stronghold for this species of frog, spending much of his time at the Mashomack Preserve.

Unfortunately, as has been the case for him elsewhere on Long Island, he found nothing.

This area is the northern-most boundary for the traditionally southern species. While no one is sure why the leopard frog has declined so drastically, Mr. Feinberg speculates that phragmites, the tall, invasive wetland grass, may play a role by crowding out native vegetation and filling in ponds that previously held open water.

Disease is the other primary likely culprit, although there are many other factors that may contribute to the problem. In addition to their value as essential components of regional biodiversity, amphibians are also excellent bio-indicators because of their sensitivity to environmental change and disturbance.

Southern leopard frogs are usually greenish-brown, around two to three inches long and have large dark spots on their backs and sides. They have cream-colored inner thighs and a white spot in the center of the tympanum, a circular disc behind each eye. The similarly spotted pickerel frog has no such

spots and yellow-colored inner thighs.

While it is still common elsewhere, this species may now be extinct on Long Island. If surviving populations can still be found, Mr. Feinberg plans to work on the conservation of the species in the hope of saving it from disappearing entirely from Long Island.

Anyone who has any information or has seen this species on Long Island should contact Jeremy Feinberg by calling (917)482-3705 or emailing him at [jfeinberg@bnl.gov](mailto:jfeinberg@bnl.gov).

*Cindy Belt*

*The leopard frog's loud chorusing from freshwater ponds used to be deafening ...*

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